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PINR, AMGT, MG, QA  
SUBJECT: QATAR CONFIRMS FIRST THREE CASES OF H1N1

REF: DOHA 397

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(U) KEY POINTS  
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-- Qatar publicly announced 16 June its first three confirmed cases of H1N1. One is an AMCIT toddler who was transiting Doha (see reftel), while a second is an Iraqi student who returned to Qatar after participating in the State Department-funded Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program. All three patients are stable and improving, according to the Ministry of Health.

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(SBU) COMMENT  
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-- Post has "if-asked" press guidance on-hand and sent a warden message 17 June on the latest developments.

-- Separately, the U.S. military has drafted an agreement with the Qatari Ministry of Health to take custody of U.S. service members arriving with flu-like symptoms. The agreement is awaiting signature by the Ministry of Health.

End Key Points and Comment.

Confirmed Cases  
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11. (U) The Ministry of Health announced 16 June that three H1N1 cases had been diagnosed in Qatar. The first was a two-year old child from New Zealand who arrived in Doha 13 June on a flight from Australia via Dubai (Emirates Air 409 from Melbourne and Emirates Air 843 from Dubai). The child was accompanied by two members of his family who are residing in Qatar. He was diagnosed with H1N1 early 16 June after symptoms of the flu appeared two days after his arrival in Doha and he was admitted to a local pediatric emergency center. The Minister of Health said the child and his family were given medication and he is now recovering.

12. (U) The second case was a two and a half-year old AMCIT child who arrived 14 June on the direct Qatar Airways flight from New York (see Reftel). The child and members of his family have received medication and have been isolated.

13. (U) According to the Ministry's press statement, a medical team was sent to ensure that all who had contacts with the infected patients had not contracted the influenza. Moreover, the statement urged all those from the two flights to present themselves to a health center if they felt symptoms such as high fever or any respiratory inflammation or coughing.

Qatari YES Participant with Flu-Like Symptoms  
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14. (U) Separately, the Ministry confirmed H1N1 in a 17-year old

Iraqi student living in Qatar who recently returned from the State Department-funded Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program in the U.S. (Note: This follows the confirmed cases of H1N1 among Bahraini and other students on the same program). The Ministry asked the local AMIDEAST representative for the names and phone numbers of all other YES returnees in Qatar (which he provided) so they could be contacted and evaluated for possible symptoms.

#### Rumors, Confusion Over Evaluation Procedures

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15. (U) Two anecdotes below illustrate local concerns over H1N1, the difficulty of managing information, and the sensitivity in the Qatari medical community over travelers coming from the U.S.

16. (U) Following the Ministry's public announcement, rumors began swirling via text message that a local McDonald's employee had been infected with H1N1 and the restaurant shut down. Late in the evening, the Supreme Health Council sent out a text message to all mobile subscribers denying that any restaurants had been closed and calling on residents to trust information from official sources only.

17. (U) One of Post's U.S. staff members encountered confusion at a private hospital (Al Ahli) 15 June when her mother, visiting from the U.S., exhibited allergy-like symptoms and went to the hospital for evaluation and medicine. Concerned about her recent arrival from the U.S., the hospital staff isolated the patient and her daughter for 3 hours, then transported them via ambulance to Hamad Hospital, and then another medical facility for two more hours before a doctor finally made the determination that she exhibited no H1N1-like symptoms and could be released. (Note: This anecdote also

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points to the apparent lack of common procedures in the private medical community for evaluating potential cases.)

18. (U) At the same time, the MOH is trying to manage public perceptions. During a press conference yesterday, MOH officials assured Qatar's preparedness for an outbreak and advised that H1N1 is not now as dangerous as many people fear. Citing the much higher death rates for seasonal flu, one official noted that "swine flu can be easily treated if detected in time and the patient could recover in just five days."

#### Update on U.S. Military Agreement with Qatar

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19. (SBU) U.S. medical personnel at Al-Udeid Air Base (AUAB) in Qatar have reached agreement with the Qatari MOH on a procedure whereby AUAB representatives will take custody of suspected cases of U.S. service members arriving at Doha International Airport for evaluation by US medical personnel (the agreement is waiting for final signature from the Qatari side). (Note: Thermal scanners and a screening process are in place on base to screen arriving passengers. All U.S. military personnel transiting AUAB from outside the CENTCOM Area of Operations are now required to go through a screening process 7-days and 24-hours before their travel through the base.)

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